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A 4
LETTER
TO
MR. JOHN PROCTOR
OF
NETTLEHAM,
IN THE
COUNTY OF LINCOLN,
FROM
THE REV. W. HETT,
MINISTER OF THE PARISH.

not carried about with divers and strange doctrines;
Heb. XIII. 9.

deavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of
Peace. Ephes. IV. 3.

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LETTER TO
MR. JOHN PROCTOR.

LINCOLN, June 5, 1793.

SIR,

WHEN last I saw you at Nettleham, at a meeting of the inhabitants called together for the purpose of settling the parish accounts, now about a fortnight ago, you told me, in the hearing of the company, that "you had deserted the church because I do not preach the Gospel, and that the person you now hear is a preacher of the Gospel". If this charge against me were as well founded as it was confidently affirmed, it would be a very heavy one indeed, and one that I should have severely to answer for on the great day. But before you or any other of my parishioners take upon you to decide whether I preach the Gospel or not, I would advise you to attend to my discourses for a whole year together; and not only to hear what I say, but moreover to reduce to practice the duties I recommend. When you shall have done this you will be much better qualified to judge of the soundness of my doctrines. *If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.* John vii. 17. As the Scriptures give the best directions for a good life, so a good life is the best comment upon the Scriptures. He who, with a sincere intention and according to the best information he can procure, makes the sacred writings the rule of his conduct, will seldom be at a loss to comprehend the meaning of them; and whenever he meets with any difficulties which he cannot surmount or any obscurities which he cannot explain, satisfied with, and rendered happy by the practical efficacy of what he does understand, he presumes not to be wiser above what is written; he wrests not the Scripture to his own preconceived opinions, but without reluctance acquiesces in that degree of ignorance which he has not the means to avoid.



The tree is acknowledged to be truly valuable, not from the beauty or the multitude of its leaves, but on account of the usefulness and abundance of its fruit. The man is known to be what he ought to be, not by his words only, be they ever so pure, ever so religious, but by his practical virtues and Christian graces. *Though he speak with the tongue of men and of angels, and have not charity, he is become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. And though he have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge; and though he have all faith so that he could remove mountains, and have not charity, he is nothing.* 1 Cor. XIII. 1. He may be possessed of the form of godliness, but he is an utter stranger to the power of it. A man may, by repeated groaning and constant affectation, bring his visage to be that of a death's head upon a mop-stick; he may make its appearance still more lamentable, by the addition of a slouched hat and lank hair; he may ever be upon the cant and whine; he may be able to string together texts of Scripture upon any given subject with as much expedition as he can count his fingers; he may upon the most trivial occasions, have the sacred name of Jesus Christ upon his tongues end; he may constantly introduce religious subjects into conversation, even over pots of ale at a parish meeting, and be ready to fight with every one, who does not think as he does, and still be very far from being actuated by the true and genuine spirit of the mild and merciful Jesus. *Behold, my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgement to the Gentiles. He shall not strive nor cry, neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets,* Matth. XII. 18. *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my father which is in heaven.* Matth. VII. 21. The Christian religion does not consist in faith only, but in works also; not in an affected garb and outside formality, in violent words and zealous expressions, but in the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, in keeping a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man. *Who is wise and endued with knowledge amongst you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of*

wisdom. James III. 13. As the real existence of a man's faith is shewn by his works, James II. 18, 26, so the genuine excellence of any precepts cannot be better ascertained than by the effects they produce upon the lives and manners of those who make them the rule of their actions. Could you who think and speak ill of me, be once induced to lay aside your own self sufficiency and submit to be led to the **WATERS OF COMFORT** by your established pastor for the space of twelve months, you would probably at the termination of them be far wiser and better men, better neighbours, and better Christians, and be much more charitably disposed towards me than at present you are.

But as the matter now is, whilst one of you is of Paul, another of Apollos, another of Cephas and another of Christ; whilst you are running after every pretender to religious information, each adhering with a determined obstinacy to the opinions suggested by his new guide, and endeavouring with all his might to compel others to come into the notions he himself has adopted, when you meet together, whatever may be the occasion, you too generally quarrel before you part, concerning your religious tenets: and whilst you persuade yourselves that you are respectively employed in converting others to the **TRUE FAITH**, you are effectually destroying that **CHARITY** in your own breasts and in that of your neighbour, without which all your pretensions to a superior knowledge and a belief of the truth as it is in Jesus is an empty boast and a ridiculous folly. When you vouchsafe to attend the divine service at your parish church on a Sunday, you come charged with the same spirit of self conceit and captiousness. You don't enter the house of God, as you ought to do, with humility and self abasement, with a hearty desire to pray and to be instructed in saving truths by hearing the word of God read and preached to you; but you come full of your own prejudices and prepossessions, and if you don't hear there what your respective teachers have asserted to be the Gospel, and it is impossible for any one man, were he ever so willing, to adopt his notions to the discordant maxims of all your instructors, you remain in the house of prayer with disgust and dislike;

you leave it vexed and disappointed, and probably employ yourselves during the remaining part of the Lord's day in making ill-natured remarks upon what THE PARSON SAID, and reviling him because he does not think as you have been taught to think. *Now in this that I declare to you, to adopt the language of the Apostle upon a similar occasion, I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse.* 1 Cor. xi. 17. And he who attends the divine service in public with no other intention but the malicious one of finding fault with his teacher, had much better say his prayers at home in private, and make "that most excellent gift of charity, the very bond of peace and of all virtue, without which whosoever liveth is counted dead before God," the main object of his petitions to the throne of mercy.

Having thus far addressed myself to those only of my parishioners who censure me because they are not satisfied with the general tenor of my discourses, the number of whom, I have the pleasure to know, is very small when compared with that of those whose good opinion I have the happiness to possess, but of whom I look upon you as the most violent, and a professor of the most dangerous principles, I now beg the attention of both my friends and enemies to the following facts and reflexions.

You must recollect that, on a Sunday about two months ago, in the church porch, you asserted, in like manner before the major part of the neighbours then and there assembled, that "good works are not essentially necessary to salvation." I believe these were your very words. I will add two other circumstances of a similar nature; the former of which occurred to me, and the latter is the subject of common conversation at Lincoln.

One Sunday last winter, as I was riding home from Nettleham, after having done the duty of the church there, I met a parishioner of mine, a weaver, on his return from Lincoln; probably brim full of the precious doctrines he had recently imbibed at a shop of prophane-ness there established. Not having for some months past seen him at his parish church, and having been informed that he led a very wicked life in many respects, I thought

I should not act improperly if I inquired the reason of his absence. Addressing the man by his name, says I, to the best of my recollection, "you never come to the church."

"Oh, no, Sir. I'm whats called an ANTINOMIAN. I know it's an ABSCONDED, BLASPHEMY NAME."

"Well, but whatever be your name or religious persuasion, you must believe that you ought to lead a good life: and I understand you are guilty of a many very bad things, such as frequent drunkenness, absenting yourself from your wife and family by the month together."

"Oh, Sir," replies the man archly, "WE DON'T STAND MUCH UPON WORKS."

The day being cold I could not remain long enough upon the road to attempt to convince him that it is necessary to practise the several duties recommended in the Gospel as well as to believe its doctrines, if we wish indeed to be the disciples of Jesus Christ, who did no sin neither was guile found in his mouth; who exhibited to his followers, in his own conduct, the most consummate example of every moral excellence, of every practical virtue. This man has occasionally, since the above declaration, attended the service of the church; but I cannot help observing, that, whenever, in his presence, I am inculcating upon my hearers the necessity of a good life, he seems not to rest easy upon his seat; and by several antick tricks, such as hiding his face with his hands, or popping his head below the desk, he manifests his disapprobation of my sentiments.

The other circumstance I allude to is this. A certain barber was in the act of shaving a very respectable clergyman at Lincoln at the time when the populace was returning from a view of the execution of a murderer on the gallows at the north-west corner of the castle.

"'Tis a great pity," says the operator in soap-suds, "that the man should have been hanged."

"Why so"? says the minister of the Gospel. "He was clearly convicted of the murder with which he was charged."

"I allow that," says the jesuitical tonsor, with his razor suspended; "but he is not therefore criminal." And in order to make good his bold asseveration, he adds, "Why now, Sir," beginning to scrape again, "IF I WERE TO CUT YOUR THROAT, I SHOULD BE GUILTY OF NO CRIME." The clergyman, as might be supposed immediately dismissed his paradoxical shaver, and never again permitted him to apply an edged tool to the surface of his visage, lest he should, at any time, by an irresistible impulse, be urged to make a deeper impression.

I have subjoined the conversation I had with the labourer in hemp and flax, together with the extraordinary position of the casuistical chin-scraper, because they seem to have imbibed, from whatever source, the same principles with yourself, that "good works are not essentially necessary to salvation:" or, in other words, that "a man may commit every species of the most atrocious wickedness, such as murder, adultery, robbery, &c. and still be liable to no imputation of guilt:" or, which is much the same thing, "may still be in a state of salvation." For as, in reason, where no law is, there is no transgression; so, in justice, where no guilt is, there can be no punishment. Whether the weaver be a disciple of yours, or the barber your Gospel teacher, I take not upon me absolutely to determine.

Now, Sir, as you also hinted at the meeting alluded to in the beginning of this epistle, that you were persuaded in your own mind, not only that the principles you had embraced for your future conduct in life were in themselves true, but also that you had right to propagate them amongst your neighbours, I think it my duty, as your appointed instructor, as well as that of the inhabitants of Nettleham with whom you frequently converse, to tell you in plain terms, that I look upon the doctrines advanced by you, by the weaver, and by the barber, as above related, if reduced to practice, to be in direct opposition to and destructive of ALL RELIGION NATURAL AND REVEALED, as well as subversive of CIVIL SOCIETY AND ALL GOOD GOVERNMENT. As you have already written to me one letter, if not more than one, upon the subject of religion, I shall be obliged to you if you will

favour me with still another; in which you will have the goodness to acquaint me upon what grounds you assert that "good works are not essentially necessary to salvation:" what you mean by the words "good works;" what by "essentially necessary;" and what by "salvation." When you shall have maturely deliberated upon the matter alone, you may, if you think proper, consult your Gospel teacher or teachers at Lincoln, whether one or three be the number of them; for I am not afraid to encounter a triple headed monster, directed and encouraged by your skill, in defence of what I believe to be the truth; and in opposition to tenets, which must bring both those who propagate and those who adopt them, they be influenced by them in the regulation of their manners, to inevitable destruction of both soul and body in Hell. I am, Sir, with the most sensible concern for your eternal welfare,

Your sincere friend and well-wisher,

WM. H E T T,

Minister of the Gospel, at NETTLEHAM.



on the Author